

THE VISIONARY TOPOGRAPHY OF HÁFIZ*

BY DARYUSH SHAYEGAN

Khwája Shams ud-Dín Muḥammad Ḥáfiẓ-i Shírází, the Persian poet of the fourteenth century, is one of the greatest mystics and lyrical poets of all time. The Iranian tradition has designated him the *lisán-al-ghayb*, “the tongue of the Invisible” and *tarjumán al-asrár*, “the interpreter of the mysteries.” And this for good reason, for of all the poets who have written in Persian—and there are very many of them—he has enjoyed the most privileged position, being, as it were, the intimate interlocutor of every heart in distress, of every soul that is seized by mystical exaltation. It is no accident therefore that Persians often consult his *Díwán*, in the same way that the Chinese consult the *I Ching*.

Being the interpreter of the mysteries, Ḥáfiẓ is also an undisputed master of spiritual hermeneutic (*ta’wil*); I would even say that his vision is fashioned of the *ta’wil*, as the poet not only searches into the unfathomable mysteries which open up thanks to the divine theophanies, but he is himself the locus where these same theophanies unveil themselves. This vision is reflected as much in the structure of his *ghazals* as in the almost magical perfection of his word, and in the sovereign art with which he maintains complete and undisputed mastery over all the resources and nuances of the Persian language; this vision is such that with him the art

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of the mystical lyric reaches an apotheosis that has never been surpassed: he marks both the supreme flowering and the uttermost limit of his art.

All the millenary genius of Persian art: the judicious equilibrium between form and content, the economy of means, the striking concision of paradoxical ideas, the affective and polyvalent tonalities of verbal magic amplifying itself on several registers, the polymorphic correspondences of symbols, the bewitching aesthetic of the Eternal Feminine scattered like so many alluring images in the world's mirrors, condense miraculously in his art. This is why Háfiz is not simply a great Persian poet, he is the 'miracle' of Persian literature; it is in him that the millenary sap of a culture is crystallized, which, grafting the prophetic tradition of the Muhammadan Revelation on to the ancient spirit of Iran, made a synthesis so full, so profound, that it became, as it were, the *humanitas* of all Islam, oriental and Iranian.

Every Persian has a private bond with Háfiz. It matters little whether he is learned, mystic, unlettered, or *rend* (inspired libertine), as Háfiz called himself. Every Persian finds in him a part of himself, discovers in him an unexplored niche in his own memory, a fragrant recollection from the interior garden of which he is the unique guardian. It is because of this communion that the poet's tomb is a place of pilgrimage for all Persians. Everyone goes there to seek be it but a particle of his presence: humble people from the bazaar, minor officials, intellectuals, poets, ragged beggars, all go there to collect themselves and to receive the poet's message in the silence of their heart.

How is it that Iran's most esoteric poet should also be the most popular? How do we reconcile this symbolic language with a popularity which makes the poet intimate Friend in every household? This popularity does not owe so much to the clarity of his language as to the occult correspondence which it awakens in every heart that hearkens to his call: every listener seems to find in it an answer to his question, every reader thinks he is discovering an allusion to his desire, every man finds in him a sympathetic interlocutor capable of understanding his secret, and of harmonizing it with the modulations of his song. For example, love assumes different forms according to whether it is envisaged on one level or another. It will be passionate and earthly love for some, and a profound nostalgia in quest of their original soil for others; and it will be the divine Beloved for all those who, opening themselves to what lies behind the veil

of symbols, attain to a level of first events. Hence this 'connivance' of the poet with all his readers, whatever register and level they belong to.

Thus, the understanding of his hearers varies according to their knowledge, their sensibility, but each receives his or her due and no one goes away empty. With the reading of Háfiz, as with the Qur'án, the less one comprehends intellectually, the more one receives spiritually. By the association of shaded tonalities endlessly reverberating on the keyboard of the senses, transmuting correspondences into synchronic states amplified more and more, this poetry penetrates the heart, creating a juxtaposition of states of the soul, by which the receptive soul and the symbolic tenor of the poem harmonize in the coincidence of the moment, so that this synchronicity of symbol and soul becomes the mystical configuration of a precise state.

This is also due to the particular structure of the *ghazal* itself. The reader has the impression that the poet has an eye "with multiple facets;" the world no longer unfolds itself in a simultaneous blossoming. Each distich is a complete whole, a world; within the *ghazal* one distich is not joined chronologically to the next, but is synchronically consubstantial with it. It is like a world within a larger world, which forms an integral part of the *Díwán*, as this latter forms an integral part of the cosmic vision of the poet. So, from one distich to the next, the same tonalities are amplified on extended registers, calling forth magical correspondences at every level.

The source of the energy of the poetic vision is the eye of the poet's heart, which is at once both the point of origin of all the soul's vibrations, and the center which "spatializes" the space of the vision. This synchronic coincidence of planes of vision is the beginning of the soul's dialectic movement, since the limitations of the vision are made good by a continual flow back and forth between the heart of the poet and the primeval source from which he draws his inspiration. In other words, a perpetual oscillation between self-revelation of the Divine in its self-concealment, and the concealment of the Divine in its self-revelation; between a Beauty that attracts as it repels and a Majesty that repels as it attracts. Why is the heart the starting point of this movement? Because, as Háfiz says as he addresses the Beloved:

Thou hast set the Treasure of Love in our ravaged heart,
Thou has thrown the shadow of fortune over the ruined corner.

Here we encounter three essential symbols of the dialectic of love in the work of Háfíz: that is to say, the dispenser of the Treasure of Love, Love itself, and the ravaged heart. This Treasure, the poet adds, is also a profound sorrow (*gham*), a poignant nostalgia:

The Lord of pre-eternity (*sultán-i azal*) offers us the Treasure of Sorrow (*ganj-i gham-i ‘ishq*)

That we may descend into this ravaged dwelling (*manzil-i wiráneh*)

Let us look at the connotations of the symbolism of the heart in speculative gnosis.

The heart, says the Islamic mystic, is the Throne of Mercy, and Shaykh Muḥammad Láhijí, who wrote the famous commentary on Maḥmúd Shabestári’s *Rose Garden of Mystery* (*Gulshan-i Ráz*), adds, “just as in the outside world, the Throne is the epiphany of the name of Mercy, likewise in the interior world it is the heart (*qalb*) that is its epiphany. At every breath of the Merciful One, God manifests himself in a new theophany in the heart of the believer.” The heart of man is always in motion (the word *qalb* in Arabic means both “heart” and “revolution” in the sense of inversion); a motion that manifests itself in terms of renewal and resurrection at every instant, and which works in such a way that the instant of disappearance coincides immediately with the appearance of its counterpart. The heart is therefore the center of the Throne and the Throne in its periphery; being the initial point of epiphany, it is also the center which calls into being the space of vision. It is for this reason, says Háfíz, that the heart holds the cup of Jam, the cup of cosmic vision, which is also the mirror reflecting the invisible world (*ghayb namá*). But the heart is also ravaged with wounds (*majrúh*) as it broods longingly over the stigmata inflicted on it by the Beloved, and acts as a shield against the innumerable arrows that the Beloved’s brows let loose. The heart is also purple with the flame of Love and bears as a mark of devotion the “scar of the tulip” (*dagh-i lála*). This scar, says Háfíz, “which we have placed in our heart is able to set ablaze the harvest of a hundred rational devout worshippers.”

These three essential symbols: the Lord of pre-eternity, the sorrow of love, and the ravaged heart, raise us immediately to the level of the first theophanies, and bring us within the orbit of the famous diving saying according to which God said:

I was a hidden Treasure, I longed to be known.
So I created the creation, in order that I should be known.

God is a Hidden Treasure, that is, an unfathomable essence in the Mystery of Ipseity. But this treasure longs to be known, and initially in His innermost heart a strong desire manifests itself, a nostalgia to reveal Himself; then comes the second stage which fulfills this desire and designates the Names that were concealed in the undifferentiated Thought of God.

Every Name of God aspires to be made manifest, this is what the concept of God’s nostalgia and His Love of manifesting himself (*hubb-i hudúrī*) conveys; it demands an epiphany, a mirror in which it can be reflected: the knower (*‘álím*) aspires to be known (*ma’lúm*). This mutual aspiration, this sympathy between Archetypes striving to be invested with the Divine Presence and Names seeking a mirror to contemplate themselves in, constitutes the second visionary theophany (*shuhúdī*), or the marriage of Names and Attributes. But the Archetypes are mirrors of Divine Beauty, and the image reflected in them is the world. To this two-way movement—the longing of the Hidden Treasure to reveal itself in creatures, and the Love of these creatures, aspiring to be united to the Names of which they are epiphanies—correspond the two arcs of descent (*qaws-i nuzúlī*) and ascent (*qaws-i ‘urújī*). The descent symbolizes the ceaseless influx of Being; the ascent symbolizing the return movement to God; the former symbolizes the creation in a recurrent and never-failing effusion, the latter the resurrections of beings and their return to their initial and final cause. The cosmic vision of the poet opens into the space between these two arcs, the one originating from the pre-eternity of God (*azal*), and the other starting out from man himself to flow into post-eternity (*abad*).

I. BETWEEN PRE-ETERNITY AND POST-ETERNITY

It is in alluding to this same space between *azal* and *abad* that the poet says:

From the Dawn of the first Beginning till the twilight of the last End,
Friendship and Love have drawn inspiration from one sole pact, one
single trust.

Here we enter upon Háfíz's visionary topography, we arrive at a world whose co-ordinates are not ordered in the quantitative time of chronological events, and which consequently is neither historical, nor linear, nor progressive, but a world in the interior of which every event is presence, and every duration an instant of this presence. Unquestionably, with regard to the eternity of the Divine itself, the pre-eternal and post-eternal have no meaning, since in its Essence, pre- and post- coincide in the indeterminacy of the divine Ipseity. They take on meaning only in relation to the shadow of God, in relation to that Other-than-He which, while it is a veil obscuring His face, remains no less a necessary expedient of His self-revelation. God and man are the poles of creation; it is between these two poles—one the Origin with regard to descent and the other the Origin with regard to return, that pre- and post-eternity derive all their direction and meaning.

Without the creation of man, who took upon himself the destiny of his folly, there would have been neither initial nor final point, there would have been only the occult eternity of the Hidden Treasure. To see the world as a respite between the initial point and the final point of the cycle of Being is already to anticipate one's return, indeed one's eschatology; it is also to participate in that "play of the magical glance" (*kirishma-i jádú*), in that cycle of love thanks to which the two-way movement of the two arcs developing in opposite directions, sets the cosmic wheel of Being turning. In this state, the poet is established at the center of Being and, as it were, sets the wheel of Love turning. And even while it remains immobile in bewilderment (*sargashta-i pábarjá*) his heart nonetheless spins about in all directions like the needle of a compass. Having become in this way a visionary witness to this play of love, he is the outlet where "the twin tresses of the Eternal Beloved" (*sar-zulfayn-i yár*) are united. It follows that this witnessing is a cosmic vision (*did-i jahánbin*) which contemplates the play of the cycle of Love turning without respite in the instantaneous succession of a presence that is also, for Háfíz, a co-presence in this Play; and a co-attendance at the cosmogonic events of the genesis of the world; that is to say, an act of foundation. For in being present at the first cosmogonic events, the poet is not merely present at these events but, participating in this act, he lays the foundations, through his word, of the world, and assumes a demiurgic role. "Come," he says, "let us split apart the domed ceiling of the celestial spheres, and let us lay

the foundation of a new structure." It is by virtue of the nature of this co-presence at, and co-foundation of, the first events that the poet peoples with symbols the visionary space that blossoms, like a primordial lotus, between *azal* and *abad*.

Háfíz is unquestionably the most original of all philosophical poets. He never turns his gaze from the primeval focus whence all inspiration comes to him; every glance for him is a glance only insofar as it opens like a magic lamp in the Niche of Prophetic Lights; every drunkenness is drunkenness only insofar as it drinks deep of the wine of the primordial tavern; every head of hair is a head of hair only insofar as the waving chain of its tresses binds up again and commemorates the alliance of the primordial Pact ('ahd-i alast); every morning breeze is a breeze only insofar as it brings to us a fragrant breath from the Quarter of the Friend (*kúy-i dúsṭ*). All his attention, his joy, his senses are tense for the space of that unique moment that is granted where every light is a divine theophany, every cup of wine a reflection of the Face of the Beloved, as well as the form of the azure bowl of the sky; every remembrance a reactualization of the primordial memory. His whole soul is present in this sacred space where being is mythogenesis and the *event* an archetypal act in the dawn of the eternal beginning. And it is as a Seer casting his gaze over the "garden of the world" (*bágħ-i jahán*) that he would gather, "thanks to the hand of the pupil of his eye, a flower from the Face of the Beloved."

The eye of the poet, illuminated by the eye of the Beloved, sees in this garden the world unveiling itself as the dazzling face of the Beloved, and also becoming clouded over like its dusky hair that darkens its resplendence and makes it appear like "darkened day" (*rúz-i tárik*). This oscillation between Beauty's occultation and self-revelation and its self-revelation and occultation, is conveyed in a number of Háfíz's *ghazals* by the "Night of Separation" (*shab-i hijrán*) and the "Day of Union" (*rúz-i wasl*); for every separation is great with an imminent union, and every union potentially conceals a separation. This succession of repulsion and attraction, which mutually provoke each other, engenders the dialectic movement of Love, and the ascent of nostalgia that permeates all Persian mystical poetry. Here are some examples from Háfíz:

How am I to spread my wing in the span of thy Union,
For its feathers are shed already in the nest of separation.

And in another place:

In this dark night I have lost the path of the quest.
Come, then, O star that guides us.
Go where I may, my anguish does but grow—
Beware this desert, this endless road.

II. THE AESTHETIC COORDINATES OF THE VISIONARY WORLD

Let us see now how Háfiz goes about furnishing this space which opens up between *azal* and *abad*; what, in other words, are the æsthetic consequences of this visionary topography. It goes without saying that we shall scarcely be able to analyze the whole bewitching æsthetic of his poetic world; but we may try to reveal some themes, some modalities of his expression.

Let us say at the outset that the visionary space between *azal* and *abad* comprehends the entire topography of Being itself; that is to say, the ontological hierarchy of the superimposed worlds: the *jabarút* as well as the *malakút*, the world of Archetypal Images, of which Henry Corbin has spoken, as well as the world of sensible phenomena. But for Háfiz, who is a mystic and above all a poet, the question is posed not in terms of conceptual explication but in the form of poetic licence, and by the elaboration of a whole magic of symbolic forms suited to convey the polyvalence of what, to the last, remains ineffable, beyond any form of expression. In Háfiz, all things come together to translate the untranslatable, to express the inexpressible, and to do this, he has recourse not only to the structure of the *ghazal* itself—which unfolds itself like concentric circles progressively amplifying at each reprise the resonance of spiritual states, and which, because of its drastic limits, demands a polishing of thought to the point of transparency—but Háfiz exploits to the full all the virtuosities and subtleties of the Persian language, such as pairs of opposites, correlative terms, word play, homonyms, etymological contrivances, rhythmical alliterations, cadenced assonances, so enhancing the webs of symbols which each reflect.

1) There is in the first place a whole constellation of visual images connected with divine Beauty; symbolized by the most alluring features of

the Eternal Feminine, such as the flowing locks which by a backward movement, like the arc of ascent, bind the lover once more to the initial place where the first knot, the first lock of that hair, is tied; and this lock is an Alliance (*paymán*) that the poet vows never to betray or turn aside from. The eyebrows of the Beloved symbolize sometimes the arched prayer-niche (*mihráb-i-abrú*); sometimes the bow which lets loose the arrows of her lashes; sometimes the arched roof of the temple of vision of pre-eternity; that is to say, before the ceiling of the vault of heaven had yet been set in its place. The beauty-spot is in keeping with the unitary vision of the world. This “black point” is, the poet says, “but the image of thy beauty-spot in the garden of vision.”

Starting from the æsthetic elements of the Eternal Feminine, the visionary topography of the poet is, in broad outline, formed: the topography of the land of the Friend (*kishwar-i dúsṭ*), which has its lanes, its quarters, its prayer-niche, its *ka'ba*, its *qibla*, its hours of contemplation, its garden of ecstasy; whence rises that fine dust which serves as collyrium for his eyes; whence flow the images that throng his imagination; whence rise aloft the messages that come to him, sometimes on the breezes of *šabá* (morning) caressing him at the hour of dawn when the candle burns low, sometimes in the cup-bearer’s vermillion cup, sometimes in the song of the hoopoe. In Háfiz these varied images express the symbol of the divine messenger that we meet again in the form of a youth or angel in the visionary narratives of Avicenna and Suhrawardí; in the form of the Holy Spirit, assimilated to the Active Intelligence in the philosophers; and it is once again the idea of this messenger which is symbolized by the office of mediator that falls to the Angel Gabriel in prophetic revelation. This topography also delineates a whole region of the heart that the poet names *hawá-yi dil* (literally, the weather of the heart), and which constitutes the human configuration of the spiritual realm of *malakút* to which the poet aspires, and in relation to which the world is only an illusion, a snare. Háfiz says:

Her hair is a trap, her beauty-spot the bait in the trap,
And I in quest of the bait, have fallen into the trap.

2) In its auditory and narrative form, this visionary space is also a story of Love (*qiṣṣa-yi ‘ishq*) or the story of a passionate sorrow (*qiṣṣa-yi ghuṣṣa*); an eternal dialogue between lover and Beloved, one and the same

story which is never repeated in exactly the same way, and each narration of which is taken up in a new and hitherto unexpressed form, since it recounts the story of a unique soul in search of its Beloved. Háfíz says:

The nostalgia of Love is always one and the same story,
But at every hearing it is made new.

But this story goes back to the “story” of an original recital, to a first revelation:

Behind the mirror I have been made to be like the parrot:
I repeat what the Lord of pre-eternity has ordered me to say.

Just as every vision is illuminated at the Niche of Prophetic Lights, as every hearing is a hearkening to the original Utterance, as every story of love is a differentiated, particularized version of this same original Utterance, so each presence at the first event is also the remembrance of an alliance whose prolonged echoes constitute the chain of memory, and which the illusory attraction of the world often makes us forget. All of the senses: touch, sight, taste, and, in particular, smell (because the recollective powers of this latter are singularly evocative), are combined in extremely subtle, finely shaded proportions in order to awaken, each in its own way, the memory of the Friend, like the sound of bells of the caravan in the desert, the aromatic musk of the Tartary gazelle, the exquisite aroma of wine, the sweet balm strewn by the messenger wind, so that the fragrant sap of his memory pervades the whole soul of the poem and creates that almost magical space in which images, whatever sensible object they belong to, coincide synchronically to weave the web of this immemorial memory.

3) If the world is impregnated with the memory of the Friend, this memory is also the recollection of a drunkenness, of a cup drunk in pre-eternity within the primordial Tavern:

Last night I saw the angels knocking at the tavern door,
Modelling the clay of man, becoming drunk with the original wine;
The inhabitants of the sacred enclosure and of the divine *malakút*
Drank from one cup with me, the pilgrim.

If then the angels have mixed the clay of man with the wine of mercy, man carries within himself the quintessence of that first drunkenness and,

drinking from the cup in the tavern of the Magi, he does but receive from the cup-bearer what was destined for him from the beginning. But to receive that which was from all time due to us is tantamount to assuming our destiny; it is also tantamount to commemorating the act by virtue of which it was destined for us. It follows from this that the entire universe becomes a tavern fragrant with the wine of merciful Being; and all creatures, all the “drunken ones” of the tavern of the Magi, are like so many cups, and each of them receives, according to the capacity which is his lot, a drop of that delicious drink; and the drunkenness from that drink lasts until the resurrection. As Háfíz says:

Whoever has drunk like me a draught from the cup of the Friend
Shall not become sober until the dawn of resurrection.

The images relating to the tavern, to cups, to the cup-bearer, are so many symbols which, grafted on to the æsthetic ground of the Eternal Feminine, give rise to this erotoco-mystic and Bacchic symbolism of the poet of Shiraz, which is so alluring, and which (alas!) often leads to shallow and hedonist interpretations of his poetry. That there is no antagonism between the earthly wine and the divine wine, just as there is none between profane love and the love of God, since one is the necessary initiation to the other, is what Háfíz intends to show. He not only exalts sensible beauty and “earthly nourishment,” he transmutes them, thanks to the incantation of his word, into a divine and fantastic banquet at which angels become cup-bearers drunk with love, like those ravishing and lascivious nymphs we admire in the form of *apsáras* in the Buddhist grottoes at Ajanta and Ellora.

4) All these different modalities of sensible expression: sight, hearing, taste, as well as smell, converge, finally, in the memory of an event which is a sort of alliance which itself constitutes man, as well as his destiny. What then is the meaning of this Alliance to which we have referred? Háfíz says:

The heavens could not bear the burden of this Charge (*bár-i amánat*)
And the winning lot, the Trust, falls to me, the fool.

This Lot is the burden of the Charge (*amánat*) entrusted to man at the beginning; man is, in other words, the repository of the universality of the Names and Attributes, in accordance with this quranic verse, which says:

We offered [the Trust] to the heavens, to the earth and to the mountains. They refused to take it upon themselves and they were afraid of it; and man assumed it for he is dark (*zalúman*) and ignorant (*jahúlan*). (Qur'án 33:72)

And in the exegesis of the mystics this means: we offered the repository of the universal to Heaven, symbolizing the Spirits, to Earth, representing material bodies, and to the Mountains, symbolizing the world of Archetypal Images; we appealed to their ontological fitness, but they set themselves against it, being unfit to do it, while man had the capacity; that is to say, according to Háfiz, he was foolish enough to take on a responsibility that the entire universe refused.

Háfiz's openness to the space of memory, as well as his witnessing of events which are so mingled with the mythical dawn of every beginning, work in such a way that the poet, while still in this world, is beleaguered by another world, and while still captive in the snare of illusions, he remains nonetheless the free bird of the garden of visions. This perpetual shuttle between two orders of existence, the one partaking of the free flight of the bird initiated into the "rose-garden of the sacred," and the other mingled with the lamentations of captivity, betrays a paradoxical position which remains inherent in the ambivalent situation of the Seer himself. The poet knows that he belongs to the world of *malakút*, that there is his dwelling-place, the more so as all the epiphanies he contemplates unceasingly invite him there; but he also knows that he has fallen into the cage of earthly existence. Now and then the poet acknowledges his powerlessness to take his flight towards the vertiginous heights.

How shall I turn within the space of the world of Sanctity
Since in the alcove of combination [of elements] I remain nailed to
my body.

The effect of the oscillating position of Háfiz between the world of sanctity and the fall into "time" is that his position expresses on the plane of the spatial movement of the poetic vision that which at the ethical level of *gnosis* remains the paradoxical status of the liberated sage. The poet remains suspended between two manners of apprehending things: having one foot in the other world and one foot in this world; it is with the eschatological bias of the former that he will see this world unfolding itself

before his eyes. That is, the time of the poet's presence lies between *abad* and *azal* and is therefore an unveiling; but to this visionary time-space Háfiz opposes a horizontal, linear time which runs between the two shores of the world.

From shore to shore the host of darkness stretches,
From *azal* to *abad* opens the dervishes' respite.

His paradoxical situation comes precisely from the crossing of these two times, one of which flows out into post-eternity (*abad*) completing the cycle of Being, while the other establishes the horizon of becoming on the linear plane. It is with regard to this horizontal time that the world is a lure, an illusion, a snare; and to emphasize all this futile trumpery, Háfiz uses the image of the new bride.

The world in its outward form is like a new bride,
But whoever cleaves to it offers his life as dowry.

Or again, the world is a ravishing bride, but be warned that this "chaste and modest one becomes the bride of none;" and her infidelity knows no limit. These negative aspects of the world, likened to infidelity, to inconstancy, to the fleeting attractions of a beauty which is, alas, evanescent, are connected with guile, with deceit, because this world, despite being bride ('*arús*), is nonetheless an old woman ('*ajúz*), all wrinkled, full of craft and cunning and who, weaving insidious intrigues, catches creatures in the mesh of her snare; lending herself to all and giving herself to none, "an old woman with a thousand lovers" ('*ajuz-i hazár dámad*). In short, the world is a piece of wizardry, a trick of the conjuror and the illusionist (*shu'bada*). And the more the abyss of this world is revealed to the poet, the more burning becomes his desire to escape from it, and the more raging his thirst to return to his original home.

Where are the tidings of the Union, that I with all my soul may take
the leap?

I am the bird of the Holy places, could I but leap outside the snare of
this world.

This desire for transcendence is at times so irresistible, his ardor so overflowing, that Háfiz not only wants to shatter the glass of confinement, to break down the walls of all the prisons, but goes so far as to overstep

the frontiers of the resurrection itself, now too narrow to contain the super Abundant ecstasy of a soul who wants to break the cosmic egg, to rend the ceiling of the celestial sphere, “in order to lay there the foundations of a new building.”

III. THE PARADOXICAL ETHOS OF THE INSPIRED LIBERTINE (*rend*)

Now what is the ethical behavior of the possessor of the cup of *Jam*? It is here that the notion of *rend* comes in, that untranslatable term that we render indifferently by “inspired libertine,” while taking care to underline the inadequacy of this translation; for “the most untranslatable words,” says Charles du Bos, “are those that mean most.” The word *rend*, as Háfíz understands it, sums up the complex and unique traits of the psychology of the Persian. If, in the words of Berdyayev, Dostoevsky illustrates more than any other Russian thinker the “metaphysical hysteria” of the Russian soul, the *rend* of Háfíz is the most evocative symbol of the indefinable ambiguity of the Persian character; an ambiguity that often confuses not only Westerners but also the other peoples of the Orient. The term is liable, because of its polyvalent cultural content, to interpretations on many levels, which are often contradictory, indeed paradoxical; all the more so because it implicitly contains its ugly side. These conflicting senses are always resolved when they are reintegrated into the initial constellations to which they all belong.

In this term we find the differing tendencies of the Persian character: its suppleness, its power of adaptation which is not necessarily opportunism, but an art of balance and of “shrinking,” as Confucius so aptly put it; however, detached from its original sense, this word can come to mean opportunism. This term also evokes a lively lucidity, a *savoir faire*, a refinement of action, a tact that goes all the way to compliance, a discretion in speech, which are neither craft, nor hypocrisy, nor an affectation of mystery; but can, outside their context, become those very things, being reduced to insidious shifts, not to say to dissembling and imposture. Again, this term denotes an interior liberty, an authentic detachment from the things of this world, suggesting the deliverance, in however small a measure, of the man who lays himself open without shame, naked to the mirror of the world, degenerated from its primitive context, this attitude

can turn into one of exhibitionism, of posing, and of mere libertinism. Equally in this concept we find a sense of immoderacy, a behavior out of the ordinary, shocking, scandalous.

This term expresses, further, a predilection for the uncertain, for language that is veiled and masked, for hints and insinuations, which in the authentic *rend* are expressed in inspired paradoxes (*shatḥiyát*), in the discipline of the arcane (*taqīya*); but deflected away from its original meaning, it ends in thunderous, puffed-up discourses, and at times in plain falsehood. Finally, there is in this concept a boundless love of the divine such as we see in the great thinkers and mystics of Iranian spirituality; but detached from its mystical content, it is transformed into fanaticism and steered by *homines magni*, to the psychology of the mob. These are the positive qualities of this whole ethic of conduct, almost indecipherable for the non-Persian, with the exception perhaps of the Chinese, that we find in Háfíz’s concept of *rend*.

The *rend*, annihilated in the Essence and attaining to subsistence in God, is reborn at the level of the first events and rediscovers the world with the eye with which the Hidden Treasure, unveiling itself, brings to light the magical play of its Beauty. This disinterested gaze of the *rend*, which is also the gaze of the Divine itself, Háfíz calls *nazarbáz*; a term every bit as difficult to translate as the word *rend* itself. Translated literally gives, “he who plays with his gaze.” In defining his own vision Háfíz adds:

I am the lover (‘áshiq), the *rend*, the *nazarbáz*, I own it in all candor,
That you may know the manifold arts with which I am adorned.

These multiple arts have a common denominator, which is the art *par excellence* of the one possessed of cosmic vision; but they nevertheless express the various modalities of an extremely subtly-shaded truth. Seen from the perspective of dialectic Love, this art is the art of the lover in quest of union with the Beloved; considered from the point of view of ethical conduct it will be simply the art of the inspired libertine, whose provocative, scandalous attitude shocks the narrow-minded, breaking the barren charm of conformity with which people called “rational” hem themselves in; and as seen by the interpreter of the “science of the gaze” (*ilm-i-nazar*), this art will be the magical art of “the one who is possessed of the art of the gaze” (*şâhib-i nażar*).

If the divine face becomes the epiphany of your gaze,
There is no doubt that now you are possessed of the gaze.

To play with one's gaze means not to apprehend the world as an object or an idea, but as an unveiling. Not to see the world as object, is also not to represent it as something out there, laid out in front of us, but to discover it as something opening spontaneously, suddenly before us, like the unveiling within ourselves of a flower in blossom. If the *nazarbáz* knows and sees that this unfolding is a Play of the divine gaze, it is because his gaze is a Play which has for stake the Play for which the Treasure puts forth its bewitching spell. "It is upon the magical Play of thy gaze," says Háfiz, "that we laid the foundation of our being." Now, to be co-witness of the magical play of the divine gaze is also to free oneself from the hold of the two worlds.

I say it in all candor and am pleased with what I say,
Being the slave of Love, I am freed from the two worlds.

It is the union, or the annihilating experience in the Majesty of the essence, and subsistence in its Attributes, which permits the poet to reach the level of the Play, and to be co-witness of the space where this Play unveils itself. It is because of this effacement in this eruption out of the cycle of Being that the poet, tying again the two extremities of the two arcs, in the configuration projected by his gaze, reflects back as the point of coincidence, recomposing and founding again the center and circumference and the pivot which support the axis of the world and the space where the Play of the world opens up. This co-witnessing of the space of the Play is possible only through a surrender of the will, an abandonment to the Play of the divine magic, seeing that it is on the very gratuitousness of this Play that the poet has founded the edifice of his being, and has totally abandoned himself to it.

On the circle of Destiny we are the point of surrender,
That your thought may be all grace, your beginning all order.

If the surrender is an unreserved abandonment to the Play and to the space where this Play unveils itself, it is also, on the plane of consciousness, a non-thought, a stripping away of all that is other than His thought, and on the plane of the will, a non-willing: that is to say, an emptying of

all volition which would oppose itself to the bounteous freedom of this Play.

The thought and will of the self have no existence in our vision [the vision of the *rends*]:

The vision and will of selfhood are sacrilege in our religion.

It is armed now with this ethic of non-willing, and supplied with the vision of non-thought, which together constitute the true religion of the *rends*, that Háfiz so relentlessly unlooses himself, with a rare audacity that makes him one of the greatest protesters in the history of the world against the prohibition-mongers, the inquisitors, the accusers, the preachers, the tradesmen of gnosis, who in the name of symbols devoid of all content, of religion reduced to a commerce in souls, distill the venom of their blindness, who inwardly are as empty as a drum and destitute of all true sorrow. They are precisely the ones who, in making the Qur'án the "snare of hypocrisy" (*dám-i tazwír*), remain outside the religion of love.

Speak not to the accusers about the mysteries of Love and of
drunkenness,
Since you suffer no pain why do you want Him to heal you?

It is the authenticity of this suffering which binds man to the root of Being, which is lacking in the inconscient (*bí-khabar*), the rationalists (*'aqil*), the false ascetics, the sanctimonious (*záhid*), whose inauthenticity Háfiz deplores:

The inconscient are dumbfounded by the play of our gaze.
I am as I appear; it is for them to play their role.
The rationalists are the [fixed] point of the compass of Being,
But Love knows well that their head turns round within this circle.

The inauthenticity of the "inconscient" is not limited solely to certain individuals but represents an entire category of people who, because they take pleasure in the narrow framework of their "selfhood vision" and believe themselves to be the center of the compass of being, do not know that they are drawn along on it by the whirlwind of Love; in other words, they do not know that it is Love that turns the circle; and so they remain outside that religion of love whose champion Háfiz became, pushing to its most extreme consequences a dispute as old as the world; a dispute which

has from time immemorial, and particularly in Persian literature, set in opposition the tolerant generosity of the liberated thinker and the obsessional meanness of those who think they possess the truth. Háfiz exposes not only a narrow spirit that he styles the narcissistic selfhood-vision, not only a reductionist ethic that he denounces as a snare of hypocrisy, but also and above all a fiction which consists of taking desires for reality.

Lord forgive the warring of the seventy-two nations,
For not having seen the truth they have steeped themselves in
a fiction.

Fiction (*afsána*) is precisely that screen of prejudices and fixed views which the inconscient project upon the unfathomable depth of what at the deepest level remains a disinterested play of the world: in short all the deceptive appearances which make inauthenticity into a solemn act of self-justification.

In contrast to this, the paradoxical attitude of the *rend* conveys on the ethical, human plane a truth which suffers no limit, no constraint, no repression, be it ever so justified in the eyes of the oldest tradesmen in the world, that is to say religion's prohibition-mongers. Every repression is necessarily a falsehood, a constraint which shackles the spontaneous play of the blossoming of the art of the vision; it is a constraint upon others and upon the censor himself, indeed it is the dark side of that which, driven back, reappears showing its other face:

Those preachers who from the height of their pulpits sparkle in their sermons,
When back at home devote themselves to business of a different sort.
I have a difficulty, and submit it to the wise men of this assembly:
Those who exhort to penitence, why aren't they penitents themselves?
One would say that no longer believing in the day of the last judgment,
They corrupt, by their fraud, the work of the supreme Judge.

To corrupt the work of the supreme Judge is to interfere in the natural course of things, it is to judge men, it is, again, to curtail the free spontaneity of man; for is it not in him that the universality of the divine Names and Attributes is manifested? Who then, Háfiz asks us, could "discern good from evil behind the veil (of multiplicity)?" Sin is for the poet never moral vice: it is instead every constraint that encourages falsity,

every fetter which would close an interior door, which would level one of the many dimensions of this mystery that is man; which would lead to the trap, to the futility of empty reputation, to the suffocating limits of an idea, to the absence in life of the suffering of Love, to the sclerosis of everyday life; in short, all that could cause us to remain outside that religion of love, that original religion that we receive as the "heritage of our primordial nature" (*míráth-i fitrat*). Sin is, in the final reckoning, every action which would betray this primordial nature, which would be false to it, and which would thwart the spontaneous flowering of its Play.

Though on all sides I am drowned in the sea of sin,
Being Love's initiate, I am a guest in the house of Mercy.

Let us take an actual example, the closing down of the taverns and the cabarets. This is a so-called hygienic measure which right-minded censors willingly permit themselves in order to reduce sinners to an arid and austere regime of penitence. But this measure has for Háfiz a two-fold baneful consequence: it is, on the one hand, the closing of a door and, considering the quality of the man who instigates it, the closing of an interior dimension, reduced now to the "selfhood vision" of the censor's own narrowness of heart; and, on the other hand, this closing necessarily coincides with the opening of another door, which is that of falsity, of deceit, of hypocrisy; and Háfiz says in this regard:

If only the doors of the taverns could be reopened again,
If only the knots of their repressive measures could be untied.
If by the blind conceit of the pious they are shut,
Be patient, for thanks to the love of God they will be opened again.
By the purity of the rends, these dawn drinkers,
Numberless doors will be opened by the key of prayers.
They are closing the doors of the taverns, O my God do not give your approval,
For it is the door of hypocrisy they are opening.

The act as such has no absolute value for Háfiz; even blasphemy and sacrilege change their sense according to whether they are envisaged from the point of view of the cosmic vision of the wise man, or from the point of view of the limiting blinkers of the bigots who only project the screen of their own unwillingness; that is to say that every action is bad only if it

is grounded in a narrow mind; captive in the nets of the fiction of the world. To the visionary gaze of the *rend*, who is free from all attachment, of all alienating thought, whose heart is polished like a mirror, and who has made his ablutions, like Hâfiż himself, in the shining spring of Love, wine, for example, not only is not defiling but is rather the elixir of deliverance, and it is in the purple substance of this purifying drink that the poet soaks his prayer-mat. For every inwardly pure being longs for the Friend, it little matters whether he is a sinner or a virtuous man, one who drinks to the dregs, a drunkard or one awakened. And it is also from this original purity that Hâfiż's tolerance flows: a tolerance which is not to be taken in the usual sense in which we use this word, but which is a deliverance so fundamental, so original, so far removed from the taints and defilements of prejudices, of beliefs, of confessions and of sects, that it appears as a cleansing spring, obliterating at last all the chimeras that men make for themselves

And I shall leave the last word to the poet of Shiraz himself:

Do not judge the *rends*, you who boast your purity —

No one will indict you for the faults of others.

What is it to you whether I am virtuous or a sinner? Busy yourself
with yourself!

Each in the end will reap the seed he himself has sown.

Every man longs for the Friend, the drunkard as much as the
awakened.

Every place is the House of Love, the Synagogue as much as
the Mosque.